

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Mayor Alan Autry

May 22, 2003

These notes are not intended to be a transcript of Mayor Autry's speech, they represent the framework of his remarks, but are not the complete text.

Thank you Larry, and thank you to the Chamber of Commerce and your sponsors for making this day possible. Let me also thank my family, and staff, the MOVE Team, Council of Economic Advisors, and the many community leaders who give so generously of their time to our city.

Someone once said, “*All politics are local.*” You’re not a mayor very long before you develop an acute appreciation for the wisdom of those words. It’s abundantly clear by now that we are in the midst of some of the most challenging times in the history of our country, our state and our city.

And, as we work to meet our respective challenges, it becomes increasingly clear how intertwined, interconnected and interdependent we really are. The new millennium has ushered in an era of mutual reliance, not seen since World War II. It is indeed impossible to accurately assess the true state of a city in America today without first taking into account the true state of the state and the state of our country.

As an African-American activist from Los Angeles once said, “Whether you came over on a slave ship or came over on the Mayflower, we’re all in the same boat now.”

“*United we stand, divided we fall.*” This era in which fate has placed us all has brought a new understanding and visceral appreciation of that phrase. And nothing reflects those words more clearly than our war on terror. A war, notwithstanding the great victories in Afghanistan and Iraq, that promises to be a long, arduous and absolutely necessary commitment. Tough times such as these must be met, must be overcome, because fate has placed in our hands not only our own destiny but the well-being of our children and grandchildren, as well.

I am honored to introduce members of our military with us today who represent of all of those who have protected our homeland or served overseas in Operation Enduring Freedom. Please welcome:

- Senior Airman Agapito Martinez and Staff Sgt. Julie Reinhardt of the California Air National Guard 144th Fighter Wing. Both served the Security Forces Squadron with distinction. Their commanding officer, Colonel Phil Skains, is here today as well.
- Major Stephen Wilson, Commander of the U.S. Marine Wing Support Squadron, who returned from the Middle East this week and represents the 200 Marines still deployed.
- Command Sgt. Major Mark Mickaelian, of the Army National Guard 1106th AVCRAD
- To all of the members of the Army, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard and Navy—on behalf of all of Fresno—Thank you!

The Department of Homeland Security has charged the cities of our nation with one of the most important responsibilities of the war on terrorism—the role of first responder. We understand the criticality of that role—we take it seriously and we accept it. Although Fresno is not considered a “classic” terrorist target, the sobering lesson learned from the Oklahoma City bombing is that any city is a potential terrorist target. We cannot and will not allow ourselves to be lulled into complacency.

I believe the single most important duty of a mayor is to protect the citizens of his or her city. Chief Dyer and his Terrorism Unit, in cooperation with Acting Fire Chief Aranaz, the Sheriff’s Department, and a myriad of other City and County agencies are working tirelessly in close concert with the Department of Homeland Security. I also understand that in a post-9/11 world, multi-jurisdictional collaboration is the only way to ensure a high level of public safety. Is all of this necessary? Absolutely. Is it expensive? Very.

The Federally mandated requirements alone cost nearly \$1 million to our General Fund. As we speak, no funds are available to hire officers. And, that reality creates a formidable challenge to City budgets. Combating foreign terrorism must not, in the process, ignore or lessen our ability to address our neighborhood terrorists—the gang members, drug dealers and the parolees that choose to squander their second chances and return to their violent ways.

It is purely and simply a matter of numbers. We need more officers and the Federal Government needs to supply and fund them. President Bush understand this “rock and a hard place” reality and is working on a plan to provide much needed resources for cities and counties. I urge Congress to move quickly and approve it, so that local government is provided with resources, including officers, to protect our citizens.

In a post-9/11 world a sense of security is good. A false sense of security is very dangerous. In regards to the terrorism threat to the city of Fresno, I pledge to you today—we will remain constantly vigilant.

In California, the connectivity between our cities and the Federal government is significant; between our cities and the state, downright overwhelming. Today, the State of California is facing a confluence of issues that has developed steadily over the past thirty years and accelerated dramatically during the past five. The problems of education, unemployment, energy, water, a decaying infrastructure, burdensome taxation for families and business, and over regulation of business are just some of those issues. The core causes of these problems have been left unaddressed and have finally evolved into a full-fledged crisis of historic proportions, that collectively pose the greatest challenge to the health of this State, and its cities—the likes of which most of us have never seen in our lifetimes.

Remarks: *Analogy between State and City relationships and addiction .*

Remarks: *Statistics regarding the allocation of sales tax and property tax revenue.*

These problems, if continued to be left unaddressed much longer, threaten not only the quality of life for this generation but also our children, and grandchildren, as well. The time for political solutions is over. The time for real problem solving is here.

I have always said, *“The truth will set you free, but first it can make you miserable.”* And the cold, hard truth is that the tough times are definitely upon us. Can it get worse? Yes. Can it get better? Yes.

You know, America has always been able to turn times of great tumult into great triumph. We know it can be done. And we know how. Do we just work harder? No. As important a factor as that is to any successful endeavor, hard work alone won't get it done. Do we just throw some more money at the problems? No. That alone has never worked, even when we had the surpluses to do it. No, getting through these difficult times will demand from us the same thing it required from all past generations of Americans—a commitment to purpose.

A purpose greater than the challenges we face, regardless of how daunting these challenges may be. A purpose that unleashes in every good American the awesome power of duty and responsibility. A purpose that gives birth to a sense of mission inside us all that morally mandates us to prefer tomorrow to today, to subordinate our own personal wants and desires to the overall betterment of our country, state and community. In other words, to put the welfare of others, including the next generation, over our own.

Our forefathers knew this. They knew that this country, despite all of its natural resources and potential, would be faced with many hardships that would challenge its very existence. They knew that having a strong purpose was the only way to survive—a purpose that would be a guiding light during our darkest hours and when as a country we would lose our way, it would be a moral compass to lead us back. A purpose powerful enough that it would live on after they were gone.

The result was two of the most remarkable documents in the history of mankind—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Remarks: *“We find these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal” and other quotes.*

About two and a half years ago, we as a city found our purpose and embraced it. We made a pledge to ourselves and our posterity that we would “build a city that creates and preserves equal access to opportunity, education and quality of life for every Fresnan.” We decided that the tale of two cities must end and the story of one community would begin. And the walls that divided the city must come down.

But there’s a big difference between having a purpose and achieving a purpose. In order for a purpose to have a chance to succeed it must be supported by a strong foundation of policy and action. A foundation built on principles, not politics.

And it is with great pride and honor that I stand before you today and say, with absolute confidence, that despite our challenges—listen to these words....I tell you from the bottom of my heart—there is no city in America with a more powerful purpose nor a stronger foundation than our home – the City of Fresno. The proof is clear and irrefutable. While most California cities are being devastated by th challenges.

Remarks: *Examples of challenges facing cities.*

The City of Fresno, your home, is standing out as model city, demonstrating not only how to survive these most challenging times but how to move forward through them as well.

I think to fully appreciate how far we’ve come, we must first look back to where we were. You know, when you don’t have a downtown, you don’t really have a town. Two and a half years ago we didn’t even have a master plan for downtown. Many throughout the state and, unfortunately, many here at home had given up on downtown. At the worst they said it was already dead, at best it was on life support.

But the city worked together like never before and not only finished the stadium on time, but on budget; and just recently received a major architectural award for excellence. The Federal Courthouse, the two IRS facilities and the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals were quote “in the pipeline”. But with the economic downturn caused by stock market debacles and 9/11, there was no guarantee that anything was going to make it out of the pipeline.

But thanks to a total team effort headed by Judge Coyle, our elected Federal, State and Local officials and President, the Courthouse and all the other buildings are going up right before our very eyes. These beautiful new structures, along with the new business incubator, will change the landscape of downtown Fresno for the better...forever. And I am very pleased to announce that the City is moving forward with the Broadway Row Project that is an ambitious and exciting plan that combines urban housing, retail and the arts in downtown Fresno.

Because of the collaboration, hard work and a steadfast rule of “principle over politics,” we now have a comprehensive plan for downtown. With nearly a billion dollars of investment, downtown is now off of life-support, breathing on its own and getting stronger and stronger every day.

Remarks: *Finding solutions to parking issues.*

In order to maintain a solid foundation, a city must have a smart growth plan. For about thirty years, Fresno’s growth plan could be best described as unbridled, undisciplined and uncontrolled. Over time the “Tale of Two Cities” was written and it was not a happy story. An inequality of opportunity, education and quality of life existed in our city, that posed an immediate and lethal threat to the ability of our city to move forward, or to even maintain the quality of life that we have.

Two and a half years ago we decided to change that. We had not had a General Plan update since 1984 or a new tax sharing agreement since 1991. I was told to forget about it. It was impossible. That the relationship between the City, Clovis and the County was so fractured and poisoned by anger that it would be better to put it off and concentrate on some other growth issues. Other growth issues! How in the world can you make a wise decision on growth if you don’t know how and where you want to grow? I didn’t buy that. I just knew deep in Harry Armstrong’s heart that he has a deep and abiding love for Fresno. Well, okay, tolerance for Fresno.

One of the first meetings I scheduled was a meeting with the Council Committee, City staff, Clovis and the County. Once again, with a commitment to collaboration, hard work and a “principle over politics” attitude, we now have one of the most historic and innovative General Plans in history. This plan effectively ends the strain and drain of urban sprawl and directs growth in and up. This plan is the right plan not only because it brings investment back to our neighborhoods that have been abandoned or neglected, but because it is an economically sound plan for the entire city. The best gift that the north could receive is a vibrant, prosperous south. After 2 ½ years in office this administration is more determined than ever to deliver that gift.

To compete in today’s world, a city must be connected in order to compete, and those connections must include Washington and Sacramento. Two and a half years ago we were completely disconnected from both. Today that has all changed. We are engaged at the Federal and State level like never before, and the benefits to this city have been extraordinary—including over \$4 million in appropriations, 92 new police officers and the highly coveted Empowerment Zone designation—probably the most important economic development too we’ve ever had. The Empowerment Zone has allowed local businesses to utilize over \$1.3 million in tax incentives.

Unfortunately, our disconnect was not limited to the State and Federal governments. Relationships between our City, the County, Clovis and other Valley cities were limited;

sometimes strained and many times non-existent. City officials around the Valley rarely spoke to each other—much less worked together.

Two and a half years ago, Mayor Hall of Bakersfield, Mayor Podesto of Stockton and Mayor Woods of Porterville and myself decided that had to change. The Central California Mayors Conference was born. Through relationships developed at the Mayors Conference, we learned that one of the most important issues facing our individual cities and counties was also the number one regional issue—air quality. I'm very pleased to report to you that the Conference is now in its third year, and after extremely successful meetings in Fresno and Stockton, will be in Bakersfield next year.

Our renewed commitment to work with the County of Fresno, and the support of Bob Waterston and the Board of Supervisors, allowed Operation Clean Air; a coalition of cities, counties, business, ag, health, utilities, non-profit and environmental groups to be born. Operation Clean Air just held its inaugural summit in April with over 350 attendees from across the San Joaquin Valley, and the campaign for an "air quality empowerment zone" has begun.

Remarks: *Guarantee on Air Empowerment Zone and other comments; including issues of important in prior years, such as water meters, growth, etc..*

Two and a half years ago there was a truancy crisis in Fresno. Today, the Juvenile Accountability Ordinance is having the intended impact of crime reduction through the enforcement of truancy laws. After one full year there has been a decrease of 6% in selected crimes reported during school hours.

Specific crimes saw even greater reductions: Narcotic offenses decreased 28%, burglary decreased 18%, alcohol related crimes dropped 23%; and Juvenile Offenses (other than being cited for violating the Ordinance) decreased 34%. Additionally, 92% of juveniles cited for truancy were not cited again during the year. This has resulted in more kids off the street and back in school.

The last 2 ½ years have also seen an absolute rebirth of volunteerism. The Fresno Citizen Corps was founded in response to President Bush's call to service to provide an efficient and effective means of harnessing the skills and resources of volunteers to make our community safer, stronger and better prepared to respond to emergencies of any kind. The Fresno Citizen Corps is supported by a broad coalition of governmental, nonprofit, civic, business, military, public safety and faith-based organizations. Fresno was honored to be one of only two U.S. cities invited to the White House to participate in the launch of the National Citizen Corps, and has been cited by FEMA nationally as an example of "best practices", and is highly successful due to the time and talent invested by many of you in this room. Thank you and congratulations. *(Thank Pete Weber and members of the board.)*

The Mayor's Fitness Council is an extraordinarily energetic group of citizens devoted to the mission of "building healthier communities by promoting physical activity and healthy

lifestyle choices.” Its members represent an impressive array of expertise, and they have undertaken an aggressive agenda of bringing health and fitness resources to every person in every neighborhood. Their members have launched programs that bring new opportunities to all Fresnoans—young, old, able-bodied and the disabled. Just yesterday they sponsored National Employee Health and Fitness Day, that saw thousands of employees in 65 organizations participate in activities designed to promote health and fitness.

And in early June, volunteer instructors will launch free weekly aerobics classes in underserved neighborhoods. The first fitness classes will be offered at the West Fresno Seventh Day Adventist Church. Please join me in thanking the Mayor’s Fitness Council.

There is no more important foundational element supporting our purpose than the City budget. It is the fiscal roadmap that allows the our purpose to become a reality. The budget that I presented this week is structurally sound and, if kept intact, will provide a lasting foundation by adhering to four primary cornerstones, which lay the foundation for a multi-year strategy that is crucial in keeping this City moving forward and achieving our purpose through what I call, “Hurricane Sacramento.”

The first cornerstone is maintaining the essential services provided by all departments. A particular emphasis has been placed on our commitment to public safety and the prevention of violent crime. This budget includes resources for District Crime Suppression Teams, a Street Violence Bureau and Parole Apprehension Teams. Year-to-date figures show that homicide is down 47%, rape down almost 12%, property crimes down 2.8%, arson down 5.8%, assaults down 2.7% and auto theft down 13%; while officers increased felony arrests by 15%. With increased enforcement, traffic fatalities have been decreased by 39%.

The budget includes resources to increase the number of firefighter positions and addresses the maintenance needs of our police and fire facilities. This budget proposes a \$7.9 million plan to make much needed improvements to various Police and Fire stations throughout the City, and includes \$2.7 million for the construction of a Fire Station in Southeast Fresno.

My second cornerstone is to invest in job creation through economic development. The “Meeting the Challenge” report, created by Pete Weber and the Council of Economic Advisors, clearly identified job creation as a determining factor of the future health of our City. It requires investing in our youth so that they have the educational base to be productive employees. It requires that our fees are reasonable, so that we are encouraging business to operate in Fresno.

Finally, it requires a safe city where businesses can prosper. This budget continues our commitment to fund those initiatives, which over time will be a giant leap forward in bringing our unemployment levels in line with national and state levels. Key economic development projects funded in this budget include the Roeding Business Park, the Regional Jobs Initiative and downtown revitalization efforts. Also, additional resources

being added to the Planning & Development Department to improve the turnaround times for the thousands of requests for community projects.

The third cornerstone continues our program of neighborhood infrastructure improvement projects, delivering a record level investment of \$18.3 million. It also addresses the needs of neighborhoods to have a community gathering place by continuing to fund our pocket park program, and to identify a site and develop the design for a Little League Park in Southwest Fresno. We must remember that when our neighborhoods succeed, our community succeeds.

My fourth cornerstone is to protect our reserve. These fiscally challenging times call for common sense and prudent financial decision making. A strong reserve position will allow some protection against “Hurricane Sacramento,” while abiding by the fundamental principle of investing in ourselves. These four cornerstones will allow Fresno to move conservatively yet relentlessly forward.

There are several key initiatives in this budget that will greatly enhance the quality of life for our citizens. One of these is the “READY” after-school program—a comprehensive after-school based program planned for 20 neighborhood parks and 50 elementary school sites. It combines a strategy of academic enrichment, youth development, fitness and nutrition, and cultural enrichment.

Remarks: *Mobile Science Workshop and work of Office of Education.*

Air Quality is another key initiative of this budget that affects economic development. The initiative includes resources of more than \$11 million for Clean Air Street projects; over \$3 million for 25 CNG buses; \$2.1 million for 12 clean burning fuel refuse trucks; and approximately \$2 million for facility improvements to handle these new clean air vehicles.

Funding for senior citizen initiatives for ongoing programs has increased from last year. We have doubled the funding for senior activities in neighborhood parks and maintained our commitments to the Senior Therapeutic, Senior Paint and Emergency Repair grants. Due to a precipitous drop in donations, we have greatly increased the City’s contribution for the Senior Hot Meals program.

The Convention Center is at a critical crossroad in this year’s budget. The Center is facing a future of unprecedented issues which will have an adverse impact upon the Center, the City’s General Fund, the City’s efforts towards downtown revitalization and job creation. To address these demands, this budget includes the privatization of professional marketing and operating services for the Convention Center.

Through privatization this budget estimates a reduction of the General Fund subsidy to the Convention Center of approximately \$940,000 the first year, and over \$1 million in future years. No issue will have a greater immediate and long-term impact on the City of Fresno than the Convention Center. Privatization is the only way to reduce the Center’s multi-million dollar dependency on the General Fund which will in turn free up much needed

resources for our neighborhoods. This is a critical component to this budget. Without it we simply cannot move forward.

The building of this budget and the delivery of services to the people required creativity, dedication, and hard work. I can't think of three better terms to describe our City employees. When faced with difficult financial conditions, our employees rise to the challenge by delivering services in a manner that can only be described as outstanding.

Remarks: *Examples of successful privately managed convention facilities.*

Education has been, is and always will be, the single most powerful determinant of a city's health and future. It is inextricably connected to public safety, economic prosperity, neighborhood growth and just about every other quality of life issue in a community. Yet the schools and the cities in which they reside have been disconnected by a draconian State-run system that over the course of the last 30 years has "socio-economically murdered" hundreds of thousands of our most disadvantaged children by taking away from them the right to a quality education.

And, I'm not blaming our great teachers, principals and administrators that we have. It's the system in which they are enslaved too. A system that is not working and never will work. A system that continues to hang 13 volumes of "Ed Code" around our teachers' neck which requires every successful teacher to break the law in order to address a student's real needs.

Remarks: *Regarding the impact of the Education Code.*

A system that continues to allow a disproportionate number of underqualified teachers into our most needy schools. A system that requires 40% of the State budget goes to public education, yet less than 30% gets to the classroom. And all too often requires our teachers to pay for supplies out of their own pocket. And a system that says the kids with special needs, our special ed students, aren't quite special enough to warrant the same investment as other children.

I tried to change things by seeking the mayoral appointment of school board members that brings instant accountability to the people and is successful elsewhere. It was predictably defeated but my goal to show how fixed the system is, was achieved. Recently, myself, Mayor Brown of Oakland, along with a former leader at the University of Southern California appeared before the Assembly Education Committee to support a bill to allow the mayors of large cities and universities the power to charter and oversight. It was a chance to again bring choice and accountability to the system—and it was defeated.

This decision was particularly painful since just before our hearing the Committee had agreed to loan \$100 million of our taxpayer dollars to the Oakland School District. How are they going to pay that back? Last time I looked, the public school system wasn't a for-profit entity.

I supported the four new board members—and I still do. I think they love kids, are working hard and my heart goes out to them. But unless systemic change is sought and obtained in Sacramento, they will be laboring in a system that will eventually, and rather quickly, devour them. After my latest experiences in Sacramento it has never been clearer to me that this system is indeed willing to refuse any meaningful reform, and go down in flames. Burning with it the hopes and dreams of thousands more of our precious disadvantaged youth.

I stated when I supported the school board members that I would not support vouchers as long as I was convinced this system if presented with real reform, had the ability and will to change. Sadly, I am convinced it will not. I will keep fighting till my dying day to change it, but I cannot go on another day supporting a corrupt system that denies choice to so many of our children. So I am announcing as of today that if the needed changes do not occur within a year I will change my position and support vouchers for *any* child; and also call on the State government to provide the transportation costs that may occur in the use of that voucher.

Remarks: *Statistics on use of drugs and alcohol by young people and impact on individuals, families and communities.*

Remarks: *Voluntary Drug Testing Kits – Provide a first step and resource tool in empowering parents who have concerns regarding their children's behavior with substance abuse. This resource is for health and safety-related purposes and not for punitive purposes.*

Remarks: *The importance of protecting the health and lives of our youth.*

Presentation of Triumph Award to: Andrew Mitchell and Joshua Dunton, and tribute to Trevin Dilfer.

Final Remarks: *Make a house a home and leave a place better than you found it. Encouragement to be a positive force in our community...think, say, pray and do something for the betterment of Fresno.*